

Appendix 2c: Evaluation of the HSBC Money Gallery from an Educational Point of View

Lisa M. Geelhood

The following format will be observed throughout the report:

1. Statement of the aims and objectives of the gallery, taken either individually or in related groups.
2. Discussion of educational issues from a theoretical point of view.
3. Key points or issues which are raised, possible approaches to take.
4. Questions to consider: these may or may not be answerable, but will be involved with marrying practice and theory.

References and key texts are listed at the end.

Introduction

How and why people learn in museums are very much a function of their motivations (why they have come here), their interests (enduring propensities to engage with a topic), and their sense of identity (who they think they are in relation to museum offerings). Schauble, Leindhardt and Martin, 1998.

Education in museums is concerned not only with the what and the why of learning but also *how* the great number and variety of visitors to galleries learn. Learning in museums is usually free-choice and informal. It may take the form of an immediate enlightening experience, or it may occur much later, as the museum experience is remembered in the context of a new situation. Learning in museums 'has come to refer broadly to a whole range of experiences that describe different ways of connecting people to the collections. Learning in museums includes emotional, social, contemplative, recreational and attitudinal aspects' (Roberts 1996). The Institute of Museum Services (in the US) defines museum learning as 'a change in an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and concepts. Learning may be more or less active and more or less self-directed, or passive and even accidental, and occurs at all stages of life' (Hein and Alexander, 1998). Although it may therefore be difficult to know if learning actually takes place, this report aims to provide assistance in optimising the environment for learning in the gallery.

Part One

1. *The main aim of the new gallery is to show that the nature of money as they [the visitor] know it has its origin in a history reaching back over more than four thousand years... Visitors will be able to follow the development of money through the centuries. Each case in the gallery will focus on a particular chapter in the story of money.*
2. Galleries that are effective educationally are moving away from conducting a monologue and are finding ways to create a dialogue between the objects and their active, participating visitors. Knowing audience characteristics, demographics, likes and dislikes, needs etc., can lead to an exhibit that is more audience centred. This, in turn, can

lead to the collections being better understood by a greater and/or wider range of people. In other words, fuller knowledge of the audience can provide curators and exhibit designers with a better understanding of who they are talking to in an exhibit, and therefore allow for more effective communication with that audience.

For many visitors an important aspect of the museum visit is the social nature of the activity. Social aspects can include interactions with others in the group as well as in the gallery. Researchers have identified family learning behaviours to be socially linked: reading labels together, discussing what is being viewed and asking questions of one another. Although other researchers, such as Dierking (1989) challenge whether these behaviours actually result in learning, the fact remains that families in particular, function as social groups within the museum. Their enjoyment will not derive strictly from the displays in an exhibit, however entertaining, but "from the enjoyment and pleasure to be found in functioning as an intimate social unit in a public place the family has freely chosen to visit" (McManus, 1994, 83).

3. Incorporating visitor viewpoints into the displays – something like visitor comment cards – can help to breakdown the barriers between curatorial viewpoints and those of the visitor. There must be people (from all over the world) coming into the gallery who recognise certain of the objects and have fascinating stories to tell about them. Perhaps these collected stories could be part of a temporary display in room 69a.

4. As few visitors will view each and every case in the gallery, or view the entire gallery systematically, is there a sense of the main aim, the larger scope of the gallery within each case?

Does the gallery both provide opportunities for and encourage discussions between and among individuals and groups concerning the collections? Are visitor points of view encouraged and/or acknowledged in any way?

Part Two

1. *Our aim in this new gallery is to introduce the general public to our collections by presenting them in a context which all visitors will recognise.
... hope to enable [visitors] to reach an understanding of why money takes the form of coins, paper money and bank money and how those forms have developed since the earliest records of payments...*
2. The use of themes can help to enhance visitor learning. Easily-recognised and widely-experienced themes may be best, however, 'even if a theme is not actively recognised by a visitor, it may still provide direction to exhibits. Without themes, visitors may find themselves in so much chaos that it reduces their ability to make a sense of an exhibit' (Jeffrey-Clay 1998). These can serve to help

visitors to relate to displays and objects, thus enabling a better understanding and enjoyment of the exhibit. They can also provide the general context within which visitors are able to approach new ideas or to explore both new and familiar concepts.

Learning about displays and reaching understandings which curators wish to demonstrate can be enhanced through the use of contexts which allow the building of connections between exhibits and visitors. Providing a context (or contexts) within which to view the displays allows visitors an opportunity to identify with the objects or concepts on display. The context will link into what Schauble *et al.* (1998) describe as the visitor's sense of identity, or 'who they think they are in relation to the museum offerings'. Without a context, the visitor may be confused as to how to approach an object or what meaning to make of it.

Providing a context which is meaningful to visitors requires some knowledge of the audience, being familiar with the experiences they are likely to have had and knowing what features will spark their interest. For schools groups, a knowledge of key stage attainment targets is needed, but also a broad familiarity with child development and a specific knowledge of what children at a particular age are likely to be interested in. For adult visitors, providing opportunities to connect with exhibits might entail multiple entry points to exhibits; the use of labels offering differing points of view; the use of adult themes; or through other events that adults are likely to be familiar with (Hein and Alexander 1998). While children's learning often involves expanding the knowledge they already have, adult learning may involve rediscovery, 'experimenting with previously acquired knowledge in novel ways' (Cohen 1989). Children and adults explore different forms of knowing, as well as different levels of knowing, so that exhibits which present information on a multiplicity of levels are the most useful.

3. Being a themed gallery is a great advantage. However, do visitors readily and easily know what the main themes and sub-themes are? Are the divisions within the gallery clearly demarcated so that visitors know 'where they are' within the overall plan of the gallery? Having money as a theme does not automatically provide a context for all visitors to identify with. For example, a visitor may be able to identify with modern bank cards, but have little understanding of how the history of money has led to the development of such devices.

4. What is the context which all visitors will recognise? Might narratives be provided or suggested which would help visitors to make connections with the displays? Are the themes presented in such a way as they are readily recognised and cannot be ignored? Providing large coloured-by-theme cards down the gallery centre or having colour-coded multi-level graphics on and above the cases, or event coloured 'feet' on the floor to follow, would make for ready recognition of main and sub-themes.

1. ... and provoke the curiosity of the casual visitor and reveal the immense breadth and depth of our holding to the specialist... text was made as clear as possible by: placing introductions at head height; putting object descriptions as close to the objects as possible; the descriptive text should be easy to find and read without detracting from the view of the objects themselves.

2. In order to feel comfortable, and possibly to be more receptive to exhibition messages, visitors need information which helps them to orient themselves within the museum setting (Griggs, 1983). They need to know where entrances and exits are. How a gallery is laid out (chronologically, by theme, by subject etc.), and what main topics or concepts will be covered.

Intellectual access to the displays is available through panel text, labels, and an exhibition guide. Providing layers of information (Hood 1983; Locke 1995) helps to ensure that all visitors, from raw beginners to experts, have access to information. Panel text can provide several levels of information, with leaflets or brochures available for more varied information.

The size and type of text and language used also may have an effect on access, both physical and intellectual. It is not just people with vision impairments who have difficulties with small, faint text, but also people who are elderly or who require glasses. The text itself can be planned so that larger type is aimed at the younger or less experienced visitor while progressively smaller type can be aimed at those with a greater depth of knowledge and/or interest.

Caulton (1998) notes that graphics can be employed along with text and can aid visitor orientation as well as exhibition interpretation. Graphics must be carefully chosen to be clear and understandable in order to aid and enhance communication rather than confuse it. "Graphics designed to create an environment for learning can aid conceptual orientation, whilst a pictogram can simplify manipulative instructions, thereby aiding intellectual orientation" (Caulton 1998). Both adults and children appreciate well designed graphics.

Presentation of information can also take differing forms beyond graphics and text, such as audio presentations or audio guides, demonstrations or live performances. By using a variety of methods, you will be far more likely to be able to provide ways for greater numbers of visitors to interact with and relate to the objects and displays.

3. The idea of providing layers of information for all visitors, from raw beginners to experts, is in evidence, but could perhaps be extended. Large panel text and graphics which orient visitors to gallery themes and sub-themes as well as the layout of the exhibition could be provided. Some of this information is only available in the Gallery Guide, which must be purchased. Graphics and/or extra large wall text could be used to indicate major sections of the gallery, major themes being portrayed, or major headings.

4. Has gallery text been 'tested' on various audiences for readability and understanding? Similarly, has the layout of the gallery been 'tested' on audiences to ensure that the over-all plan is readily grasped and understood?

Key Texts and References

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